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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

TUESDAY, MAY 8, 2007

In Today's Papers

Turkish Parliament Debates Constitutional Changes
All papers report the Turkish High Election Board (YSK) rejected an appeal by a minor opposition party to move the date for general elections up to June 24, saying parliamentary polls would be held on July 22, the date set earlier. On Monday, the Turkish Parliament began debating an AKP proposal for changing constitutional provisions. The bill drafted by AKP proposes direct popular for the presidency and limiting the term of the president to two consecutive five-year terms instead of the existing one seven-year term. The package also envisions holding general elections every four years, reducing the government's term from five years to four, and decreasing the minimum age for election to parliament to 25. The provision pulling the age limit down to 25 has been dropped due to a writing error in the text.

Despite the support of 19 Anavatan MPs, the AKP failed to reach the two-thirds majority needed to adopt the reforms without going to referendum. The second round in constitutional reform voting will be held on Thursday. TUSIAD, Turkey's elite business group, said it would be "more healthy and ethical" if constitutional changes were handled by a new parliament.

Turkish, EU Reaction to Sarkozy as French President

All papers report Prime Minister Erdogan expressed hope that the anti-Turkey statements made by President-elect Sarkozy during the election campaign will not have an effect on Turkey-France ties. Mainstream Hurriyet quotes Turkish Foreign Ministry (MFA) officials as saying they believe Sarkozy used Turkey to attract votes in the elections, but just like German Chancellor Merkel, he will change his discourse once he assumes office.

Papers report EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn told European Parliament's commission for foreign affairs, "Turkey is undergoing a difficult but historic process of transformation. Europe needs to show patience and prudence with Turkey." He told lawmakers the most

important thing now was to ensure that an early Turkish general election set for July 22 was conducted freely and fairly, and that a new parliament revived Turkey's reform process to meet the EU membership criteria. Rehn also warned any member state which sought to cut the EU talks with Turkey would have to bear responsibility for the consequences. European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso said it would be impossible for Sarkozy to end talks on Turkey's EU membership, as the majority in the EU favors the continuation of the negotiations with Ankara.

Editorial Commentary on French President-Elect Sarkozy
Sami Kohen writes in the mainstream daily Milliyet: "If Sarkozy's strongly anti-Turkey stance during the campaign was reflecting his real intentions, Turkey-France relations as well as Turkey's EU process are about to enter a challenging period. It is also possible that Sarkozy made those remarks as part of election campaign populism, which means he may soften his position in the end. Although it has been the case for many politicians to revise their stances once they get to high level positions, many analysts do not think it will be the case for Sarkozy. Coming from an immigrant family, Sarkozy is believed to act to prove himself, emphasizing his French national identity. Sarkozy also believes that the EU should preserve its cultural identity and France can play a dominant role in that. Whether he is successful or not, it is clear that Sarkozy will do his best to adapt French politics to his way of thinking. He may face some opposition from the EU and from some of the French companies which are engaged in business with Turkey. But it is unlikely that those pressures will be strong enough to have him change his policy in the short run."

Erdal Safak writes in the mainstream daily Sabah: "Given Sarkozy's stance on Turkey, he has the power to block Turkey's EU negotiation process. The upcoming EU summit in June will serve as a litmus test

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on whether Sarkozy will maintain his anti-Turkey stance. Even though the EU says that France does not have the power to stop negotiations with Turkey, the fact of the matter is that Sarkozy still has the power to block the process. He may simply object to the opening of chapters which would serve as a de facto stop to negotiations. As a French saying goes, no disaster comes alone. Along with the Sarkozy disaster, the British Premiership will go to Gordon Brown who does not even like the idea of the European Union. In other words, Turkey is losing its primary supporters of the EU engine: the UK, Germany and France."

Hrant Dink Assassination Trial

Sabah, Milliyet, Zaman, Bugun and Cumhuriyet: The trial for the murder of Armenian journalist Hrant Dink will begin July 2 in Istanbul. Because one of the suspects in the murder, Ogun Samast, is not 18 yet, this trial will be closed to the press, report the conservative Bugun and the mainstream Sabah. Sabah also reports that the Court issued an invitation to author Orhan Pamuk to serve as a witness at the trial.

Military Operation in Sirnak

Milliyet, Sabah, Hurriyet, Vatan, Cumhuriyet and others: The Turkish Military started a 20,000-troop operation against the PKK in the mountains of Cudi, Gabar and Namaz in the Sirnak region, after four soldiers were killed in the last five days in the area. Air support was given to the operation by Sikorsky and Cobra type helicopters. Meanwhile, yesterday during the funerals of two of the soldiers crowds chanted anti-PKK slogans.

TV Highlights
NTV, 7.00 A.M.

Domestic News

- The Istanbul governor has set up a special commission to probe police brutality against demonstrators during May Day protests.
- The main opposition CHP leader Deniz Baykal said CHP and the center-left DSP will form an election alliance without closing down the DSP.

- Turkey's main Kurdish party DTP kicks off two-day meetings in Diyarbakir to determine its election strategy. DTP deputy chairman Osman Ozcelik believes his party might win 37 seats in the parliament through independent candidates.

- A mass rally in support of the secular republic will be held in the Aegean port city of Izmir on May 13.

International News

- Dutch MEP Ria Oomen Ruijten, the new EP rapporteur for Turkey, said in her first statement Turkey should continue reforms.

- Yerevan has denied visas to eight Turkish OSCE observers tasked to monitor the May 12 elections in Armenia, saying the two countries do not have diplomatic ties.

- The Iranian Foreign Minister Manuchehr Mottaki told Time in an exclusive interview his country wants talks with US.

- Human rights groups accuse Israeli Shin Bet security forces of using physical measures and torture against Palestinian prisoners.

WILSON